

Socialist Standard



Tsunami
‘Free’ Press
Socialism and the Left
Reformism
Profile on Ahern

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After the Wave

Responding
to the
Tsunami



The eighth worst disaster in history. Page 6



How free is your press? Page 8



Social reformist Lord Beveridge, page 11

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"To suggest today to a member of New or Old Labour that socialism involves the abolition of the wages system, and the production of goods and services solely for use in a world of common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production, would surely invite derision."

Should the Left Consider Socialism? page 11

A Giant Wave

If there is one thing you can always rely on when major disasters strike, it is that people will spontaneously respond with whatever they can afford to give towards the relief of the survivors, irrespective of nationality, creed or politics. That the efforts of governments so obviously followed the lead of private individuals in this case tells you everything you need to know about their political priorities. And even when governments publicly pledge money, as Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, recently complained, there's no guarantee they'll actually hand over the cash. Much of their 'generosity' in any case simply involves waiving some of the crushing debt which their control of international trade imposed on these countries in the first place. While states eye each other warily to see what the others are going to do, private individuals start collections without a second thought. While public relations departments sit up at night figuring out how they can help politicians milk the situation, some workers are on the plane at their own expense to go where volunteers are needed. While governments are always looking for the angle or the pitch, the lowly masses pitch in regardless.

How different are the attitudes of the rich from those of 'ordinary people'. People who have never known wealth and never had money are always the

first to put their hands in their pockets when a cruel catastrophe slaughters complete strangers. They are the only ones who put their interests to one side and act instinctively, without once thinking of themselves, how they 'appear' and what they might get out of it. At times like this, common humanity shows its true nature in a giant wave of decency, sympathy and solidarity. How unlike our 'important people'. Politicians are furiously striking the right self-conscious poses and taking the right media-savvy positions, religious leaders wring their hands and try for the umpteenth time to defend the indefensible, to square the impossible circle of disaster and divine will, and rich celebs fall over each other to toss in a million or so but never fail to do it in a blaze of

publicity. When disaster is in the public eye, these people can always be found eyeing the public. To us, a wall of water is a terrible image. To them, it is merely a backdrop image against which they maneuver to be viewed.

Now the giant wave of publicity has started to ebb and recede. 150,000 more people in the region are severely threatened with water-borne diseases including cholera and typhoid, but the world's media will have gone home before that happens and the forgetfulness will set in. Meanwhile, elsewhere, in the first two weeks since the tsunami struck, approximately 200,000 people have died, quietly and away from the cameras, of simple malnutrition and water-related illnesses. And in the next two weeks, 200,000 more. And again and again.

It's the simple background noise of capitalism which passes unnoticed and unremarked, the lapping of a vast ocean of misery on our hardened consciousness. While the savagery of nature can wring our hearts and empty our purses, the savagery of our social system barely raises an eyebrow. Yet if there is anything positive that can be said about this catastrophe it is that human beings are at heart a caring lot and that if capitalism survives it is because of people's lack of conviction in their own abilities, and not because of a lack of depth in their compassion for others. ■



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TSUNAMI SPECIAL

Nature is humanity's best friend and worst enemy. The tsunami in South East Asia was a major disaster that, for a change, cannot be blamed on capitalism, and one which reminds us if we need it that socialism can also expect to face sudden catastrophes like floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. So how would we deal with them? We present a special Pathfinder report on some aspects of disaster prevention, risk management, and recovery.

Population and demographics

The real reason earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and floods kill so many people is that they live in known danger zones. In capitalism it is a question of livelihood and property, either or both of which prevent people moving. There is no way at present to predict population demographics in socialism, yet it must be obvious that nobody would choose to live next to a ticking timebomb, and given the freedom of movement implied by the abolition of land ownership we would expect the largest contribution to saving lives to come from populations spontaneously shifting away from high-risk areas.

Furthermore, work patterns in capitalism mean most people take their holidays at the same time, and in the same holiday areas, giving rise to a dedicated and overcrowded holiday coast industry. Instead of moving away from danger, the financial incentive at present is for poor people to move towards it. It is highly debatable, in light of all this, whether socialism would ever be required to mount relief operations on anything like the scale we see at present.

Early Warning

Much has been made of the



A number you can't lose - the ultimate hands-free phone

How Would Socialism Deal with a Natural Disaster?



need for an early warning system in the Indian Ocean, and one proposal was turned down two years ago because the risk was thought to be remote (*source: Unesco report at <http://ipsnews.net/interna.asp?idnews=27006>*). Most present systems are ill-suited to tsunamis, which cannot be detected by satellite or ocean-surface (a tsunami may only be centimetres high until it hits the shore). A new pressure sensor system (DART) sits on the ocean floor and detects a change in pressure in the water above it, a sure sign of a passing tsunami. Cost not being a factor, in socialism a network of DART sensors could be placed in all ocean floors for even unlikely events.

One such tsunami, expected when part of the Canary volcano system eventually collapses, could devastate west Africa, Spain, western Britain and the US eastern seaboard.

Communication

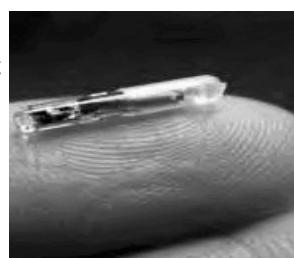
One monitoring station in Hawaii did receive early warning of the Asian tsunami but could not confirm it with other stations and could not communicate it because many public offices were closed for holidays. Even had they been open, communication to people in risk areas would have been almost impossible in the short time available. Text messaging to mobile phones can get through when signals are too weak for voice calls, but who do you call? One answer is the Cell Broadcast system, originally designed for advertising local services but generally ignored, which exploits the fact

that GSM phones can receive short data messages from the nearest cellphone base station on a separate channel from normal voice and text message communications. Another method is the mediascape system, which targets areas by global positioning satellite and then broadcasts to base stations. Phones are not destined to be separate items for much longer, with new technology emerging to have them sewn into clothes and bags.

Capitalism may be developing this, but in socialism, keeping in touch would not be a matter of keeping in credit. Finally, even if socialists at leisure prefer naked bathing, there is always tannoy. Additionally, a chip implant the size of a grain of rice could track them down and, at worst, identify them.

At present, the Verichip's usage is confined to Scottish

clubowners offering it to customers to save time at the bar (*News Telegraph, Jan 17*)

**Aftermath - disease**

Cholera and typhoid are big dangers in tsunami-affected areas, and could double the already gigantic death toll. For

What is a disaster?

Most natural disasters cannot be prevented in advance, but then, it depends what you call a disaster. Socialism, not being concerned with who has money and who doesn't (because there wouldn't be any) would prioritise those routine 'natural' disasters which capitalism is largely unable to deal with. Thus, quite apart from the ongoing disaster of famine and malnutrition, we would work flat out to save the 2 million people who die annually of diarrhoea due to poor water supplies, the 1.5 million who die of TB and the 1 million who die of malaria (*source: WHO*). These figures alone are the equivalent of almost two tsunamis a month. How would we deal with this? By not prioritising illnesses that only affect affluent westerners. The three largest drug markets today are fat reducers (\$28b), anti-ulcerants (\$25b) and antidepressants (\$20b). Drugs that would help poorer countries are not developed because drug companies stand almost no chance of recouping the average \$800m it costs to bring them to market (*source: New Scientist, Jan 15, 05, p.41*). In socialism, medical science could be re-oriented almost overnight to solve these ongoing disasters.

our remarks about capitalism's approach to diseases which affect poorer parts of the world, see **What is a disaster?**

Aftermath - food

A food crisis is set to emerge as the tsunami has introduced poisonous salt pollution into the arable land areas and polluted the water tables. Socialism could not prevent this, and is one more reason why pre-disaster depopulation would be a sensible precaution, however populations

would not have to rely on their own agricultural production nor would they be forced to stay put. A massive mobilisation of people to other regions would be inconceivable today but not necessarily in socialism.

Aftermath - shelter

After a disaster, rescue services need to supply fast accommodation. Now there may be a better way to supply emergency housing, using reinforced polystyrene panels. Polystyrene is cheap and lightweight, quick to assemble, it insulates, so it keeps cool things cool and hot things hot, it is resistant to moisture, mould and mildew, and it's energy efficient. Wrapped in chicken wire and then coated in a film of concrete, it has been tested by the Florida designers in the most extreme conditions and outperforms every other temporary structure, even in earthquake zones.

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3528716.stm>). This simple technology may very well be developed for widespread use in capitalism. However there is no guarantee that it will, as many such good ideas never see the light of day because there isn't sufficient profit in it for somebody. In socialism, a good idea and some team effort is all that's necessary.

Newsflash

Prince Harry Apologises for Not Wearing Nazi Uniform

Shocked paparazzi yesterday snapped Prince Harry in normal working clothes, minus any sign of swastikas or iron crosses. A Palace spokesperson immediately issued an apology. The statement said "It is well known that the Royal Family has a history of Nazi sympathies going back generations and the Prince recognizes that it was in poor taste to appear in public as if he was a normal person. He hopes that no Nazis were offended by his careless act and promises to keep up the family tradition in future."

Huygens Probe Sends Back First Titan Images.

The Huygens probe has sent back the first images of Saturn's moon Titan, showing a long dark shape resembling an International Communist Current. One

stunning black and



Cooking the Books (1)

One aspect of our analysis of capitalism that we have not always found easy to get across is the view that taxation is not an issue that concerns wage and salary workers since in the end it is a burden on property-holders. Now a tax dodge recently thought up and applied by some big companies such as BT, Tesco and Sainsbury's, has made it a little less difficult to explain.

At the moment, workers' pay slips show deductions for income tax and national insurance contributions (a tax in all but name, as was recognised by the merger a couple of years ago of the DSS's contributions section with the Inland Revenue), which are paid to the government, and, in some cases, contributions to the company pension scheme. We've always pointed out that these are not really paid by the employee, not even in the formal sense of personally paying the money to the government or to the pension scheme - it's just an administrative exercise - and that what matters to them is their take-home pay, not gross pay before deductions. As far as they are concerned, their employers never really paid them in the first place the amounts deducted and might as well have paid them directly themselves.

The aim of the tax dodge is to reduce the amount of national insurance contributions paid by employers, both on their own behalf and nominally on behalf of their employees. How it works is

white image reveals what seem to be discussion forums on permanent revolution leading out into a remote island of sectarianism. Another shows a flat surface that is apparently strewn with impenetrable position statements. Scientists said Huygens captured more than 300 images of the ICC and that no activity has been detected. The Cassini spacecraft continues to the edge of the solar system where it will eventually establish whether the dark planet Militant actually exists.

Tougher laws on defence of property ruled out

The law on the amount of force owners can use against workers will not be changed, Home Secretary Charles Clarke has announced. A review has concluded the current law, which allows the capitalist class

explained by Patience Wheatcroft, Business Editor of the Times (30 November) :

Put simply, the scheme involves employees being persuaded to take a pay cut if their employer agrees to pay into their pension fund the amount that had been previously contributed by the employees. The result is to lower the national insurance contributions made by the employer while generally bolstering the employee's take home pay.

The thing to note is that gross pay is reduced but take-home pay remains more or less the same (maybe up by a £1 or so a week - "bolstering" is hardly the right word, as numerical examples given by the Times the previous day showed an increase, in one case, of £110 and, in another, £38 a year). The only change is that the employer pays the (in this case) pension scheme contributions directly themselves instead of "paying" them to the employee and then deducting them immediately in one and the same transaction.

If they did the same thing with income tax, it would be immediately clear that, as we maintain, workers don't pay this tax but that employers do. What workers are paid is their take-home pay. That's what we get to live on and reproduce our working energy and skills.

In fact, it's not clear why employers don't do this anyway. It would stop workers grumbling about the difference between their purely nominal gross pay and their take-home pay that is the effective amount they have to spend. Perhaps they want to maintain the illusion amongst workers that we do pay taxes and so have an interest in tax questions.

to use "reasonable extreme violence" against strikers, protesters and communists is sufficient. "We've got all the laws we'll ever need so I don't think we have to be greedy", he said on Tuesday. But Mr Clarke added that there will be a publicity campaign to ensure workers understand they can protect themselves from capitalists too. "Do as you're told and we'll leave you alone", he said.

Thatcher fined over 'coup plot'

Sir Mark Thatcher, the son of former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was fined £265,000 and given a four-year suspended jail term for his involvement in an alleged coup plot in Equatorial Guinea. Sir Mark protested afterwards "I'm innocent, you know. If there was any plot, I lost it years ago, and so did my mum."

Red Snapper

Sound bites and unsound nibbles

The Acehnese had betrayed Allah. They were not true to their faith Allah always looks after his faithful followers If they don't become true Muslims they will be struck down."

Salman al-Farizi, commander of the radical Islamist group Laskar Mujahadin, on the cause of the tsunami. Guardian, Jan 8th

The sum required to establish an early warning system now looks pitifully small compared to the cost in terms of the tens of thousands of lives lost and the billions of dollars in damage caused.

Professor Calestous Juma, of the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, US. UN Millennium Project's report chief author, on tsunami wave. BBC News Online Technology, Jan 6th.

It would be one of the biggest breakthroughs mankind has ever experienced if we pooled our wealth in order to look after the poorer people of the world. Sadly, I don't think it will happen."

J G Ballard, novelist, Independent, Jan 4th

If I go for a walk through large parts of the South-east, I am liable to be lynched"

Alistair Darling, Secretary of State for Transport. Independent, Jan 3rd

A poison has entered the system. And it is beginning to harm us all."

The Daily Mail on the Blair/Brown rift. Jan 7th

Politics is one of the few professions that you can enter without any training whatsoever and suddenly become an expert.

Allen Carr, anti-smoking 'expert', Independent, Jan 5th

I was told in my last 'appraisal' that I wouldn't be getting a promotion or pay rise until I proved to the company that I was "worth it". I was told further that could mean "working through lunchtimes or staying an extra couple of hours in the evenings". I get raised eyebrows if I leave on-time or am the first to go home, and have chosen to ignore the pointed looks as I leave for my lunch hours.

Reader's comment re. article on unpaid overtime, BBC Online Magazine, Jan 7th

Aftermath of the Tsunami: Querying "American Values in Action"



The tsunami in South-East Asia provoked very different responses from western governments and the populations they supposedly represent.

The US state was obliged to raise its donation more than 20-fold in the light of public reaction, but arguably too late to disguise the politicians' real agenda.

Realising that upwards of 100,000 of the then estimated 165,000 victims of the tsunami disaster were Muslims, the US wasted no time in sending US Secretary of State Colin Powell to the scene of the devastation. There was much to gain from this mission at a time when the US has been accused of an anti-Muslim crusade in the wake of the devastation it has wrought on Afghanistan and Iraq.

Powell was keen to show the world's 1.2 billion Muslims that the Bush administration is not Islamophobic, even if its military machine did seem to have a penchant for the slaughter of Muslims. He said "We'd be doing it [participating in the

After the Flood - devastation in Banda Aceh

relief effort] regardless of religion, but I think it does give the Muslim world and the rest of the world an opportunity to see American generosity, American values in action."

As for the US "values" Powell's mission aimed to promote, we need only mention Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay for starters before moving on to the myriad international treaties, on gun control, nuclear proliferation, the environment, human rights etc. that the Bush administration has flicked the proverbial two fingers to since 2000.

US "values" have prompted successive White House administrations to support dictators and tyrannical regimes on every continent, from Pol Pot and Suharto to Saddam Hussein and Papa Doc Duvalier. Between 1945 and 1999, this same defender of global well-being toppled forty governments and helped crush thirty populist movements, assassinated scores of prominent individuals and perverted elections in every corner of the globe. During this period the US armed terrorists, trained right-wing guerrilla movements in the art of torture and financed armies intent on overthrowing democratically elected governments. Some values!

When asked on US television whether the death of 500,000 Iraqi children as a consequence of Western sanctions was acceptable, Madeleine Albright, Powell's predecessor under President Clinton,

replied: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price - we think the price is worth it."

It seems there are American "values" and "values". Those Powell is charged with furthering are those of a corrupt elite operating in the interests of corporate America. He was certainly not sent to Indonesia on a show of hands of the US public. His attempt to seek political capital out of present US offers of help to the disaster region is thus opportunistic and utterly despicable, nay, nauseating.

Powell further commented in Indonesia: "I've been in war and I've been through a number of hurricanes, tornadoes and other relief operations, but I've never seen anything like this." This from the man who rose to prominence trying to cover up the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, when US forces slaughtered 500 Vietnamese women and children, part of a larger conflict that left 2 million dead, many from the use of napalm and agent orange. We can only assume that Powell is suffering from selective amnesia.

While he feels a surge of pride in the knowledge the US government has promised \$350 million to the stricken areas, what is to be made of the fact that this is only a minute fraction of the amount spent on the US invasion and occupation of Iraq? Or, to put it another way, the world is meant to applaud the Bush administration for paying out \$350 million with one hand to help people in Asia, while forking out \$150 billion (<http://costofwar.com/>) with the other to kill people in the Middle East.

If you consider that we err in comparing the war in Iraq with the rescue mission in the Indian Ocean, then remember the reason for the invasion of Iraq. Bush and Blair both claimed that this was a humanitarian intervention, a rescue mission, aimed at restoring democracy and freeing the Iraqi people from years of oppression. On this count it stands as the most expensive humanitarian mission in history, considering the size of the Iraqi population - and what does this make of the people who opposed that invasion, the 35 million across the world who marched and protested at the Bush/Blair rescue mission to Iraq in February of 2003?

When Jan Egeland, the UN emergency relief co-ordinator, criticised the initial US offer of \$15 million in aid as "stingy", Bush's response was to claim Egeland was "very misguided and ill-informed". Bush later had the figure raised to \$35 million, with this figure later increased tenfold - a figure, incidentally, now dwarfed by private

"The world is meant to applaud the Bush administration for paying out \$350 million with one hand to help people in Asia, while forking out \$150 billion with the other to kill people in the Middle East"

donations in the US. All Egeland was saying was that in times of disaster Western governments do in fact appear parsimonious.

Many radical commentators backed Egeland's "stingy" claim, pointing out that the Bush administration would be spending far more on the president's inaugural celebration on January 20th and how the Republican Convention in New York last year cost a staggering \$166 million (inclusive of \$70,000 for donuts and coffee for the press). We can perhaps better set the US aid promise in context by considering that the occupation of Iraq is costing the US an estimated \$270 million per day, and that the Pentagon's military budget is \$1.5 billion per day - this spent with a view to killing people, not saving them. What else are guns and bombs, tanks and warships for? One F22 Raptor fighter costs \$225 million. It does not carry food parcels and medicines but surface to air missiles and cannons. According to the US-based International Action Centre's estimates, "for what the US is spending for less than one second of bombing and destruction, it could construct a system that could have prevented thousands of needless deaths [caused by the Tsunami]."

As in Britain, so too in the US have the general public humiliated their governments with their generosity. If we accept that the invasion of Iraq was a humanitarian step, that Bush and Blair were motivated solely by the plight of the suffering Iraqi people under Saddam, why did they not set up a charity and see how much the public would

Some of the tsunami's victims: one second of US military spending might have prevented this.

have donated to this mother of all rescue missions? Simple, because they realise that people, though often conned at election time, are just not that stupid, and that they couldn't have collected enough to feed a regiment's mascot goat.

The generosity shown towards the victims of the Tsunami disaster is not the Bush administration's "values", which Powell seems to have been implying in his



damage limitation exercise in Indonesia, but rather the basic values of human beings in America, indeed the world over. Unlike other animals, humans are endowed with the ability to sympathise and empathise with their fellow beings. Humans derive great pleasure from doing good, are at their best when faced with the worst and will go to extraordinary lengths to help alleviate the suffering of others. Across the US, as in other countries, there have been all manner of fundraising events, in all sections of society, inclusive of nursery schools, prisons, universities and impoverished communities. In some instances people have queued for over an hour to put money in a plastic collection bucket.

Americans are generous with their time as well. According to a survey by Independent Sector, a US coalition of non-profit organisations, the percentage of volunteers in America is the largest of any country, almost 56%. The average hours volunteered per week by an individual is 3.5 hours. According to Charity America, donations to charity for 2002 were \$241 billion, 76.3 per cent of this given by individuals.

If governments depended for their existence on us promoting our real values, they wouldn't last a week. That is why they spend so much time trying to divide us as a class, lying to us, instilling in us false needs, a false consciousness, appealing to patriotism and the rest of the rot. When it comes to values, there are only class values, ours and theirs. That Powell had to go to Indonesia to try to hijack any US-initiated relief effort, before it was credited to the workers of the US, shows perhaps that they fear not only class solidarity across the world but the very values that have come to the surface in recent weeks. ■

John Bissett

Floods of Tears

The undersea earthquake in the Indian Ocean on 26 December, and the ensuing tidal wave or tsunami, have devastated many areas in South and South-East Asia. At the time of writing, deaths are estimated at 250,000, a figure likely to rise, with millions having lost their homes and most of their possessions, and disease likely to increase the number of fatalities. Across the world, people have watched fascinated as their TV screens showed dramatic shots of the tidal wave hitting coastal areas, only to be appalled by the resulting devastation.

Such catastrophes make many reflect on their cause and what this reveals about the world. The religious strove to reconcile the notion of a loving god with the apparent evidence of uncaring brutality.

While science can explain how and why these things happen, mystics and other believers have nothing to offer but nauseating platitudes. The secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain opined that 'People of faith need to have a very firm belief in God almighty. It is for the betterment of mankind at large.' Of course he neglected to explain how the deaths of so many can benefit humanity. The leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales was no better, saying that Christians 'trust that prayers and belief in an omnipotent God will bring good out of seeming evil and senselessness'. But again he failed to suggest how this might happen.

While natural forces were responsible for the quake and tsunami, it is at least possible that an early-warning system could have been installed, which would have saved many lives, but of

course the issue of cost was a real problem. And its effects have been magnified in many places (in southern India, for example) by developments taking place (in the name of profit) right on the beach, thus destroying natural protective barriers such as sand dunes and mangrove forests.

The Aceh area of Indonesia has been one of the hardest hit. But little attention has been paid in the media to Aceh's situation before the earthquake. Despite its rich gas resources, its people have been blighted by poverty and malnutrition, as these resources have been exploited for the profit of Exxon Mobil and the Indonesian government. Aceh has also been subject to military occupation for years, with assassination and kidnapping rife, since the government refuses to allow a referendum on independence from Indonesia and persecutes anyone who

advocates this. The Indonesian government and army have taken control of aid supplies shipped in to the local airport, and are only distributing these to those who support them.

Of course socialism will still see natural disasters, since it will not involve any kind of 'mastery' over nature. But their effect will be minimised by sensible precautions unencumbered by the profit motive (see this issue's *Pathfinders*). Action to relieve distress will be unhampered by nationalistic and military considerations, and will make use of well-established regional and global frameworks for cooperation and responding to emergencies. It is clear that such disasters call for working together rather than against each other and provision according to need rather than ability to pay.

PB



A 'Free' Press

A free press is a de-facto sign of a liberal democratic capitalist state, and an independent media can often make things uncomfortable for those in charge. So why does the criticism persist that the free press is not really free, and that these champions of public opinion in fact collude in perpetuating not truth but capitalist mythology?

(republished by University of Illinois Press in 2002). In a timeless and scathing attack on the capitalist press Sinclair asserted "that American journalism is a class institution serving the rich and spurning the poor", likening the journalist to a prostitute, enslaved in the business ideology of the owning class and functioning to work hand in glove with political leaders and big business to deceive public opinion.

Brass Check was written in the 'Progressive Era' at the beginning of the 20th century, a period that saw large swathes of US industry come under the sway of immensely powerful inter-linking monopolistic corporations controlled by a highly concentrated elite of powerful owners. The monopolistic ownership of the newspaper industry that spawned a new journalistic style that trivialised and sensationalised news, abandoning journalistic integrity and independence, caused particular outrage and was branded 'yellow journalism'. But the essence of this condemnation was more seditious than a simple dispute over the presentation of newsprint. Critics argued that the newspaper monopoly strangled public awareness, censored all anti-business opinion and now served solely to express the owner's class interests that operated, in Sinclair's words, for the "hoodwinking of the public and the plunder of labour". The press, it was argued, must be cleansed of corrupting class bias and function as a neutral conduit for the communication of meaningful information enabling the public to exercise informed democratic preferences.

Capitalist business

In Britain, a similar concentration of ownership had already dramatically altered the newspaper industry that stifled and later decimated the popular press. During the first half of the 19th century Britain had enjoyed a thriving and vigorous popular press that criticised appalling working conditions and

**Upton Sinclair
- 'explosive'.**

was spurred on by the 'betrayal' of the 1832 Reform Act and anger at the 1834 Poor Law. The radical press produced numerous papers that "promoted greater collective confidence by repeatedly emphasising the potential power of working people to effect social change through the force of

'combination' and organised action" (James Curren and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*, p.24). The radical press was a major source of antagonism to government and the propertied class but neither libel actions nor stamp tax on newsprint were effective in subjugating it. Nevertheless, by 1865 the radical press was in decline, broken not by laws but by a combination of rising costs and market forces.

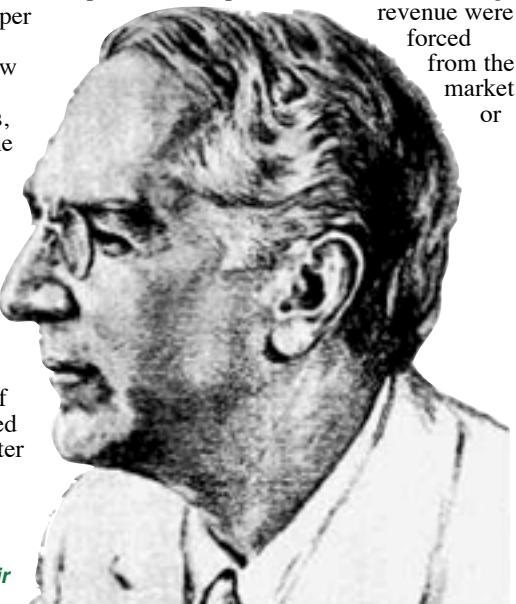
By the second half of the 19th century the rising cost of printing technology to support national newspaper circulation required major investment. Newspaper set-up costs in Britain rose from £1,000 to over £50,000 between 1840 and 1870 while in America these capital costs rose by 600 percent between 1855 and 1875, a huge investment that excluded all but the extremely wealthy. In addition to rising costs, the growing importance of advertising in Britain greatly disadvantaged the alternative press because successful advertising meant appealing to people who had money. The readers of the radical press were mainly working people on low incomes and advertisers discriminated against these newspapers because "their readers are not purchasers, and any money thrown upon them is so much money thrown away" (quotation from 1856, in James Curren and Jean Seaton, p.43).

Advertising revenue acted as a subsidy enabling newspapers to be sold at a price below the cost of production and, once exposed to the realism of commercial capitalism, competitors without advertising

revenue were forced from the market or

"The Primary Freedom of the Press lies in not being a Trade"
(Karl Marx, *Rheinische Zeitung*, May 1842.)
"Freedom of the press belongs to those who own one" (Anon)

For the last twenty years there has been increasing public awareness that journalistic integrity and the capitalist press are uneasy bedfellows. Various writers, particularly in America, have highlighted the incompatibility between a supposedly 'free press' and the production of a newspaper as a commodity for profit. Those who have criticised the press have every right to be scornful. But this is no breakthrough in investigative journalism; capitalism has always corrupted the press and led to it functioning as a mouthpiece for the ruling class, a point explosively demonstrated by Upton Sinclair in 1919 when he first published The Brass Check



sufficiently weakened to be taken over by larger companies. Newspaper production had become a capitalist business.

Sinclair too identified advertising as a main corrupting agent enabling wealthy advertisers to drive-out the US radical press and exert pressure on editors to mould content and editorial comment.

"Everywhere in the world of journalism, high and low, you see this power of the advertiser," Sinclair declared at a time when advertising, accounting for two-thirds of US newspaper income, greatly enhanced the concentration of ownership. Little has changed in an industry that allows little opportunity for new entrants to enter the market. Today, twenty-four inter-linking US corporations control over half of newspapers and most magazines, broadcasting, books and movies, while Britain is reputed to have the most highly concentrated newspaper ownership in the world, being dominated by five immense corporate groups.

Newspapers must appeal to wealthy corporations as a platform for advertising and to a readership with sufficient purchasing power to satisfy the advertisers' selling aspirations. Making a newspaper attractive to advertisers is achieved by altering content to suit the values and prejudices of those who pay advertising revenues, as was pointed out in 1910 by US Professor Edward Ross: "When the news-columns and editorial page are a mere incident in the profitable sale of mercantile publicity, in it is strictly 'businesslike' to let the big advertisers censor both" (cited by Robert McChesney and Ben Scott, *Monthly Review*, www.monthlyreview.org/0502/rwmscott.htm May 2002) A newspaper boasting a large circulation but lacking content that appeals to advertisers will rarely survive, a fact that provides an explanation for the disappearance of 'labour news' and the widespread growth of lucrative 'business news' aimed at a minority audience. The demise of the Daily Herald and Sunday Citizen in the 1960s also illustrate the point. In its final year the Daily Herald enjoyed 8 percent of daily circulation but attracted only 3 percent of the net advertising revenue while the Sunday Citizen received barely one-tenth of net advertising income of the Sunday Times. Both newspapers were considered hostile to business and therefore denied advertising patronage, while in the US the corrupting influences that Sinclair so scathingly criticised have free rein, frequently suppressing news carrying anti-business content by threatening to cancel corporate advertising accounts.

Self-censorship

But besides advertising other, less obvious, factors have also worked to make newspapers a willing mouthpiece for corporations and for government. Newspapers demand a constant flow of low-cost material from reliable sources that

avoids expensive research. With budgets squeezed, newspapers must focus where 'meaningful' news is most likely to occur. Government, corporations, trade groups and business lobbies feed the press with stories that are presumed accurate, with mutual benefit derived by delivering cost reductions to the newspaper while tending to mute criticism by limiting the access of alternative views. Similarly, purchasing news from enormously powerful agencies

like Associated Press or Reuters has cut costly international newsgathering. Of course, not all news can be printed, but when reputedly less than 2 percent of the world's news gathered by these agencies is actually passed on to the news media, it raises serious questions

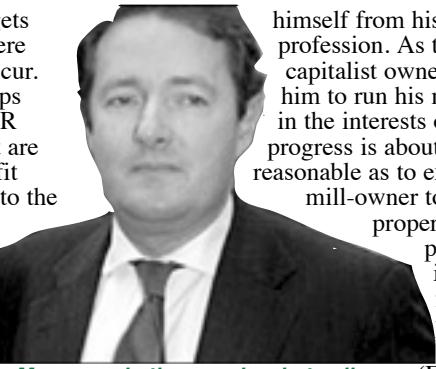
about the criteria used to filter news deemed fit for our consumption. News that seriously threatens the status quo is given scant exposure or will simply be omitted - as if it never existed. Clearly, not all capitalism's misdemeanours can be simply ignored because the consequences cannot always be hidden. The press must be seen as criticising the behaviour of a company or government, for no other reason than to maintain credibility, though such incidents are generally quickly forgotten as the press moves on to the next story.

But although censorship by omission certainly occurs it would be wrong to assume that journalism, in Britain at least, is consciously censored or that a

conspiracy amongst journalists exists to hide facts from public scrutiny. Instead self-censorship linked to the personal economic necessity to conform to institutional and company requirements make journalists, in Sinclair's words, drift "inevitably towards the point of view held by their masters". This is precisely what George Orwell meant when he wrote in his unpublished introduction to *Animal Farm*, that "unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without any need for an official ban" (*Times Literary Supplement*, September 1972).

In capitalist society the production of a successful newspaper means journalistic integrity and editorial objectiveness are subordinate to the institutional requirement of production for profit. There can be no other way, for as Professor Edward Ross pointed out in Sinclair's era:

"To urge the editor, under the thumb of the advertiser or of the owner, to be more independent, is to invite him to remove



Morgan: what's news is what sells

(Edward Alsworth

Ross, 'The Suppression of Important News', *Atlantic Magazine*, March 1910, quoted in *Monthly Review* May 2002).

More recent testimony to this enduring law of capitalist newspaper production was expressed by Piers Morgan, former editor of the Daily Mirror, when he stated, "I only judge a story on what sells and what doesn't" (Guardian, 30 November 1996).

Unreformable

Today, newspapers perform in much the same way as they did in Sinclair's time, precisely because they operate in the same economic conditions. They lock-in our views to prevailing ideology by playing on prejudices and aspirations, incessantly communicating messages that instil working people with beliefs needed to integrate them into a life of wage slavery, with advertising assisting to create a 'virtual' world conducive to buying. "Journalism," Sinclair wrote, "is one of the devices whereby industrial autocracy keeps its control over political democracy; it is the day to day, between elections propaganda, whereby the minds of the people are kept in a state of acquiescence, so that when the crisis of an election comes, they can go to the polls and caste their ballots for either one of the two parties of the exploiters".

Sinclair's book is a penetrating analysis of the early US capitalist press. But it is also the work of an author who, despite his stinging criticisms of the capitalist newspaper industry, believed that the press could in some way reform itself to stand outside class struggle and be recreated as a neutral independent force within capitalist society. Sinclair held the views that capitalism and genuine democracy could co-exist and journalism could be freed from the economic laws of capitalism to give expression to popular demand and abstract ideas of 'social justice' and 'fairness' that were divorced from the actual material conditions. But the reality is that as long as newspaper production is a profit-driven business it can never be free from the corrosive economic influence of capitalism. We need not lament this fact - for the press can perform in no any other way in capitalist society. But nor should we waste our energies on bankrupt delusions of press (or any other) reform, as Sinclair did, that at best can offer only temporary respite.

Instead, we should organise to replace a society that corrupts and debases everything it touches and build socialism where a free and equal people will enjoy a free and informative press. ■

STEVE TROTT



Reforms, Revolution and the 'Left'

Reform or outright revolution - the debate has raged for more than a hundred years. But with a hundred years of well-meaning reforms in our wake, are we any nearer the type of egalitarian society many of these reformers had in mind, and should we persist in changing society 'one piece at a time'?

Socialists are revolutionaries: we believe that the establishment of a Socialist society will involve a fundamental change in the way people live, and will necessitate the capture of political power by the Socialist working class. As revolutionaries, we do not advocate reforms, that is, changes in the way capitalism runs, such as alterations to immigration policy or the health service or the tax system. Reforms, however 'radical', can never make capitalism run in the interests of the workers. Nor should supporting reforms be some kind of tactic pursued by Socialists to gain support from workers, for workers who joined a Socialist Party because they admired its reformist tactics would turn it into a reformist organisation pure and simple. Socialists must reject reformism as a distraction from the revolutionary goal.

The reform-revolution issue is a long-standing one that has occasioned much debate over the years. In 1890 William Morris wrote an essay 'Where are we now?', as he left the Socialist League and looked back over his time in that organisation and the Social Democratic Federation. He saw

two 'methods of impatience', as he termed them. One was futile riot or revolt, which could be easily put down. The other was, to use the then-popular label, 'palliation', what we would now call reformism. Morris resolutely opposed both, since they would be carried out by people who did not know what Socialism was and so would not know what to do next, even if their efforts were successful on their own terms. Instead he advocated propagating Socialist ideas:

"Our business, I repeat, is the making of Socialists, i.e., convincing people that Socialism is good for them and is possible. When we have enough people of that way of thinking, they will find out what action is necessary for putting their principles in practice. Until we have that mass of opinion, action for a general change that will benefit the whole people is impossible."

Morris thus rejected the reformist ideas that permeated the SDF and prefigured the

Socialist Party's view on this issue.

Another important discussion took place a few years later in the German Social-Democratic Party (the SPD). Eduard Bernstein, who enjoyed the prestige of being Engels' literary executor, argued that reforms were all that should be aspired to: "The final goal, no matter what it is, is nothing; the movement is everything." This was partly because Bernstein considered that some of the unpredictability of production under capitalism could be mitigated by the provision of credit and the founding of employers' organisations (cartels and trusts). He also envisaged reformist politics and trade unions as gradually eliminating capitalist exploitation and ushering in Socialism.

Bernstein's main critic at the time was Rosa Luxemburg, in two articles reprinted as the pamphlet Reform or Revolution. Damning his work as 'opportunist', she pointed out that trade unions could only limit exploitation, not abolish it, and claimed that his views were tantamount to abandoning Socialism. Certainly we can agree that reforming capitalism will not turn it into Socialism. But even Luxemburg did not oppose reforms:

"Can the Social-Democracy be against reforms? Can we contrapose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the Social-Democracy the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal - the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labour. Between social reforms and revolution there exists for the Social-Democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means: the social revolution, its aim."

And she made no real attempt to relate reformist policies to the final goal, other than in statements such as:

"as a result of its trade union and parliamentary struggles, the proletariat becomes convinced of the impossibility of accomplishing a fundamental social change through such activity and arrives at the understanding that the conquest of power is unavoidable."

This, however, offers no reason why a revolutionary organisation should advocate reforms.

And how has the reformist argument fared over the last hundred years? Have reformist movements and reforming governments made any contribution to Socialism? The answer to this question is a resounding No! Reformist governments, like all governments, do what they have to do: they administer capitalism in the

interests of the ruling class, though they do make some effort to claim that their actions benefit the whole population. The Labour Party, for instance, has abandoned any pretensions about fundamentally changing society, and is now unashamedly the Tory Party Mark II.

"The Labour Party, for instance, has abandoned any pretensions about fundamentally changing society, and is now unashamedly the Tory Party Mark II"



Rosa Luxemburg: pointed out that trade unions could only limit exploitation, not abolish it

Reformist movements try to get elected to government or attempt to influence the government of the day, all with the aim of carrying reforms into practice or of defending the status quo against some 'anti-reform'. For the reformer's work is never done under capitalism, which continually throws up new problems which need the reformer's attention and constantly undermines any existing 'gains', however feeble. The list of potential reforms is as long as your arm; in the course of just one recent week in Manchester, there were meetings/campaigns dealing with 'rights' for homeworkers, the new Immigration and Asylum Act, the police ban on a picket outside Marks and Spencer, flood relief in Bangladesh, and the pollution caused by urban 4x4s. Which of these and many other worthy causes should the committed reformer give priority to?

The 'Left' may claim that it enjoys the best of both worlds, both supporting reforms and advocating revolution. But in fact its revolutionary posturing is just a matter of words, for its practical policies are purely reformist. Take the biggest Left organisation in Britain, the Socialist Workers Party, for instance. The 18 December issue of its weekly paper Socialist Worker carried an article on the

pension myths being peddled by the government (for the Socialist take on this, see the November Socialist Standard). Here is part of the SWP's 'solution' (from their website at <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk>):

"We don't want the present miserly level of pensions and care, we want better.

So say we did want to increase the share of GDP spent on the old by 5 percent of GDP or more. This only means increasing the tax rate by 0.1 percent of GDP a year for 50 years, a tiny amount.

It might mean returning top tax rates to closer to the ones which Margaret



Eduard Bernstein: "the movement is everything"

Thatcher's governments used for most of their time in office.

Or it might mean taxing private pensions of the rich, or returning corporation tax rates on big business to a decent level."

It is obvious that, in speaking of the rich and tax rates, the SWP envisage the continuation of capitalism, rather than its abolition. It might be argued that they are only trying to attract support on the basis of reformist policies but that they really aim at revolution. But firstly, it would be quite dishonest to do this, to get workers' support on the basis of saying one thing while really

wanting something quite different. Secondly, there is no reason why anyone who goes along with increasing corporation tax should, as a consequence of supporting this, somehow be won over to Socialism. And thirdly, the SWP are utterly silent about revolution and Socialism, suppressing all mention of 'the suppression of wage labour'. Rosa Luxemburg, as we saw, viewed reforms as the means and revolution as the aim. Like the rest of the Left, the SWP have effectively embraced Bernstein's view, abandoning revolution for reformist measures.

The Socialist response to all this is straightforward. If you want to get somewhere, aim for that destination directly, rather than going on detours and trusting that you will eventually, by however roundabout a route, arrive at where you want to be. There is, and can be, no reformist road to Socialism, nor can there be a mixture of reformist and revolutionary policies. The Socialist Party has just one aim, the establishment of Socialism. ■

Paul Bennett



William Morris: "Our business, I repeat, is the making of Socialists"

Should The Left Consider Socialism?

The Left are united in aspiring to something called 'socialism', but extremely divided on what they mean by the word. Time has watered down the term to a homeopathic level that nowadays almost anyone can safely apply, but what's the point in that?



The question arises through a controversy in my local newspaper which started with a letter headed "Ireland breeds strange brand of socialists". The writer alludes to Sinn Fein and the Social Democratic and Labour Party, both of whom claim socialist credentials, and argues that both are sectarian organisations - in the politico-religious sense of that term. As evidence, the anonymous writer cites the fact that the two organisations concerned are overwhelmingly Catholic in membership and, thus, "unlike other socialists throughout the world" and leftist parties

and governments, they are unable to make pronouncements and formulate policies concerning abortion, IVF screening, stem cell research and euthanasia.

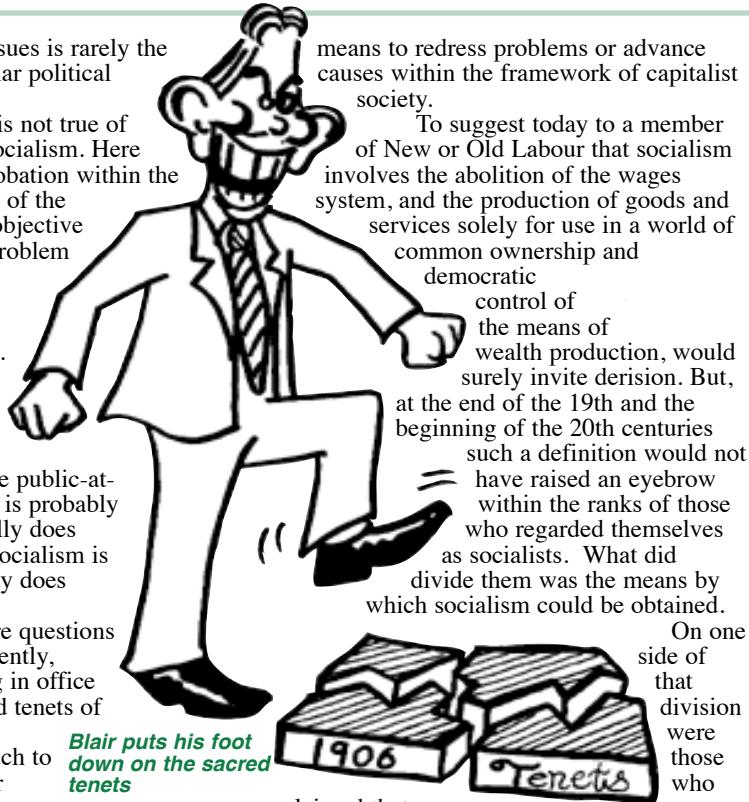
Whatever might be said about the accuracy or otherwise of this view, it reflects the fact that the Left in its multifarious facets is usually associated with ubiquitously 'progressive' causes, which, whatever their merits, do not amount to socialism. Factually, both 'progressive' and 'reactionary' attitudes to social or ethical issues are focused on the question of how the existing form of society, capitalism, should deal with such questions. What is more, support for and

opposition to such issues is rarely the preserve of a particular political tendency.

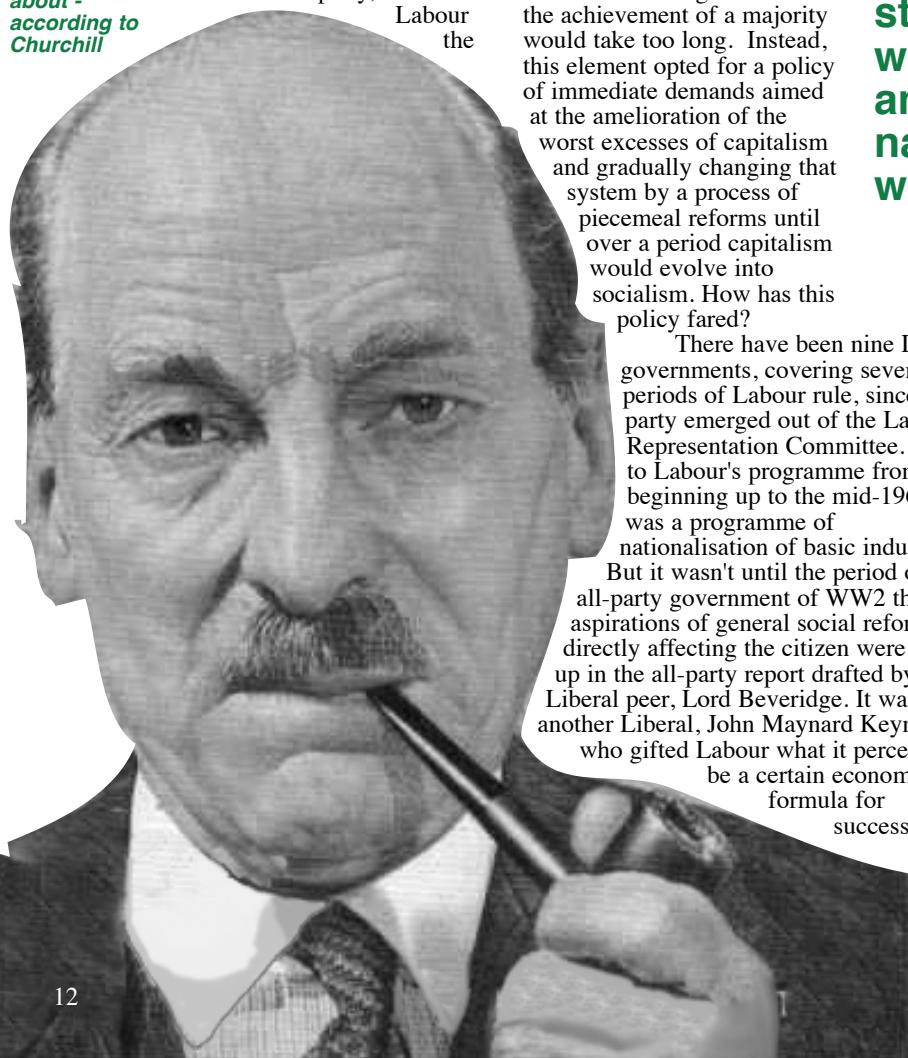
That of course is not true of the Left's claim on socialism. Here there is general approbation within the diverse organisations of the Left: their common objective is "socialism". The problem is that socialism has become simply an indivisible but undefined catchword. Ask the question, "What is socialism?" and you get a multiplicity of answers. As far as the public-at-large is concerned, it is probably true to say that it really does accept the idea that socialism is what the Labour Party does when in office.

That raises more questions than it answers. Currently, what Labour is doing in office is breaking the sacred tenets of what earlier Labour governments did, much to the ire of Old Labour supporters. Back at its roots, when the Labour

Representation Committee became the British Labour Party, in 1906, Labour was truly "a broad church". Its backbone was the Trade Unions seeking political clout for workers then, as now, living within capitalism. Additionally, there were the myriad interests of supporters of many commonly regarded 'progressive' causes. These, probably the numerically superior members of the new party, saw in Labour the



Attlee: a modest man with much to be modest about - according to Churchill



means to redress problems or advance causes within the framework of capitalist society.

To suggest today to a member of New or Old Labour that socialism involves the abolition of the wages system, and the production of goods and services solely for use in a world of common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production, would surely invite derision. But, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries such a definition would not have raised an eyebrow within the ranks of those who regarded themselves as socialists. What did divide them was the means by which socialism could be obtained.

On one side of that division were those who claimed that, because socialism could only be established on a foundation of human co-operation, its achievement necessitated democratic political action to bring about a conscious majority dedicated to its achievement. Given that majority, delegates could then be elected to parliament mandated to abolishing the legal structures of capitalism and formally empowering the establishment of socialism.

But others long-fingered socialism on the grounds that the achievement of a majority would take too long. Instead, this element opted for a policy of immediate demands aimed at the amelioration of the worst excesses of capitalism and gradually changing that system by a process of piecemeal reforms until over a period capitalism would evolve into socialism. How has this policy fared?

There have been nine Labour governments, covering seven periods of Labour rule, since the party emerged out of the Labour Representation Committee. Central to Labour's programme from the beginning up to the mid-1960's was a programme of nationalisation of basic industries.

But it wasn't until the period of the all-party government of WW2 that aspirations of general social reform directly affecting the citizen were firmed up in the all-party report drafted by the Liberal peer, Lord Beveridge. It was another Liberal, John Maynard Keynes, who gifted Labour what it perceived to be a certain economic formula for successfully

underwriting Beveridge's "Welfare State".

It fell to Attlee's Labour government in the aftermath of the war to introduce the legislation establishing the various schemes of social welfare agreed by the wartime coalition government. In each instance the case for the various reforms was argued on the logic of capitalist efficiency and control. Indeed, rather than presenting a case for the abolition of poverty, the new schemes of social welfare were effectively structured to deal with the in-built and permanent nature of poverty within capitalism.

That said, it would be churlish not to recognise the merit in, for example, the National Health Service. True, it was presented as, and intended to be, more efficient than the myriad disorganised group and panel schemes then prevailing but, at the outset especially, when it provided wholly free health care, it undoubtedly proved a boon to many people. Ironically, it was the Labour Party that soon after the establishment of the NHS first legislated for prescription charges. The service has undergone constant erosion and its decline would support the argument that capitalism cannot sustain meaningful reform.

Today, the excitement, the fervour and the hope that the early Labour Party engendered has gone and there can be no challenge to the assertion that it is a party of capitalism. Factually, Labour's claim to the support of the working class is based, and can only be based, on the argument that they run the affairs of capitalism better than their opponents. That may or may not be true but

it is a far cry from the early argument that the problems of society arose from the nature of its economic system and not the manner of running that system.

In fact 'Left' and 'Right' are today just points on the administrative spectrum of capitalism, and while the lot of

the working class has advanced materially, due to factors unconnected with the policies of the Left, real poverty, mere want and growing insecurity and fear still plague the land. The rotten values of "yours" and "mine" have advanced social alienation and fuelled crime and violence while the world outside has become immeasurably more frightening and hostile to the values that motivated many in the early Labour Party. The Labour Party has become a fertile field for careerists many of whom share the contempt of their competitor colleagues in the Tory Party and 'the business community' for the working class, the real wealth-producers.

And what contribution has Old Labour and the Left in general to the dilemma of a working class robbed now of even hope? Well... get back to the policies of Old Labour. But the problems of today are the logical result of pursuing the notion that capitalism, a system based on the exploitation of the working class, could by

means of political alchemy be made to function in the interests of the working class.

One can understand the thinking of the early Labour reformers; they had what they believed was a good theory, but history has now demonstrated that their theory was built more on hope than a knowledge of the real nature of either capitalism or socialism. The so-called extreme Left might agree: Yes, let's get back to socialism, they will say. But it is a political conjuring trick for when they set out their stall they simply offer a plethora of the old, failed reforms. They will talk about socialism but, as though it was a family skeleton, they will not tell you what socialism is. Not that they know what it is, for just like the liberal Left they would treat with surprised derision Marx's advice to the working class to remove from its banners the conservative slogan of a "fair day's work for a fair day's pay" and inscribe instead "Abolition of the wages system!".

Should the Left consider socialism, rather than arguing that reform of some aspect of capitalism will prove attractive to the working class and is worthy of struggle? If so, then how good is the argument for promoting socialism? Well, for a start, it is the only system of social organisation that can underwrite real democracy; it is the only means by which poverty in all its

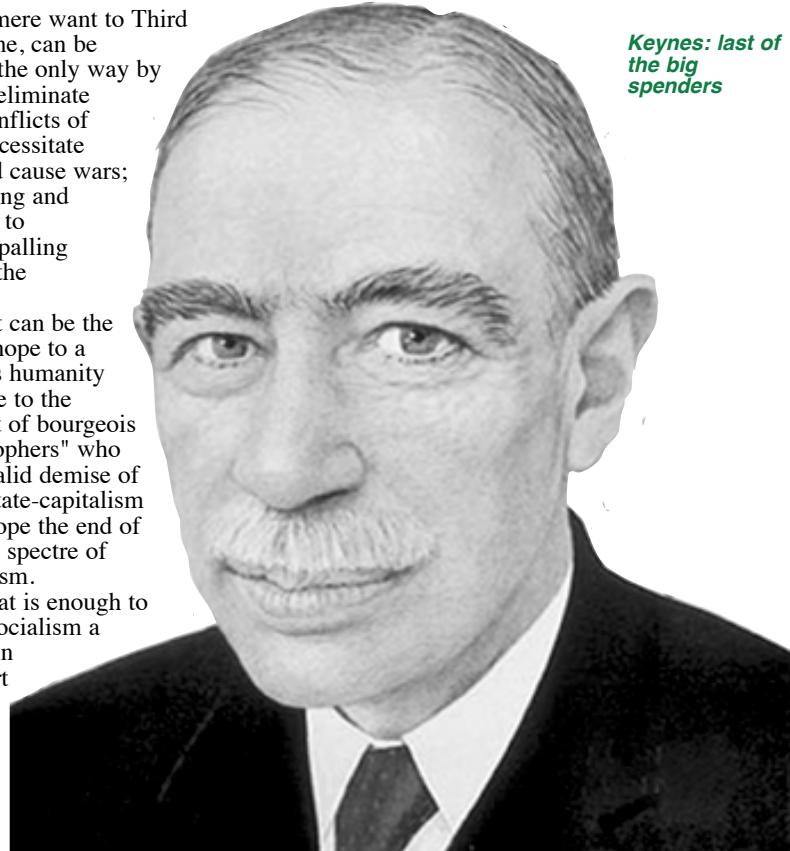
aspects, from mere want to Third World syndrome, can be banished; it is the only way by which we can eliminate those awful conflicts of interest that necessitate armaments and cause wars; it is a compelling and urgent answer to capitalism's appalling destruction of the ecosphere.

Finally, it can be the restoration of hope to a sick, visionless humanity and a challenge to the terrifying threat of bourgeois liberal "philosophers" who saw in the squalid demise of authoritarian state-capitalism in Eastern Europe the end of history and the spectre of eternal capitalism.

Surely that is enough to gain genuine socialism a hearing, to open debate and start the process of consideration.

■
Richard Montague

Keynes: last of the big spenders



Cooking the Books (2)

Banks again

An item on our website (www.worldsocialism.org/wsm-pages/currencies.html) on the myth that banks

can "create credit" by a mere stroke of the pen has elicited a response from Belgium, from three members of a party there called Vivant. Joseph Meyer, a member of the parliament of the German-speaking region of Belgium, emailed us: "In the article 'Major Douglas Rides Again' the author made an incredible stupid statement, when he wrote '... banks cannot create credit-money on their own ...'. Because the banks do this all the time, you really should publish a correcting article, in order to maintain your party's credibility".

A key plank in Vivant's programme is a "citizens' basic income" for all (also favoured by the Green Party here) and it seems that they have been tempted by "funny money" theories to explain how this would be financed. Actually, the passage our correspondent gives does not appear in the article. What we argue in it is that banks cannot lend out more money than has been deposited with them, which is indeed a denial that they can "create new credit-money on their own". What banks do every day is lend out money deposited with them, making a profit out of the difference between the rate of interest they charge and the rate they pay to depositors.

The second correspondent refers us to a site of University College Dublin (www.ucd.ie/economic/teaching/macro12.pt) on the "creation of money" which he claims backs up Vivant's view. Despite the misleading title (banks don't create money,

just lend it), the site in fact backs up our claim since it shows clearly that, if there is a requirement that a bank must retain 10 percent of its assets in cash, and if 1000 euros are deposited with it, it can only lend out 900 euros and not 9000 (as is frequently misunderstood). True, if the 900 euros is eventually deposited in a bank, then a further 810 euros can be loaned, and if this is also eventually deposited, a further 729 euros, and so on until a total of 9000 euros is lent out, but only because in total 10,000 euros will have been deposited over the same period. In this (rather unrealistic, but not theoretically impossible) scenario which is used in all economics textbooks these days, if anybody could be said to have "created credit" it would be the depositors not the banks. It is their money that the banks (re-)lend not money supposedly created by a mere stroke of the pen.

The third correspondent ends his email: "you are wrong, and if socialism is your concern, you should admit [it]". Socialism is very much our concern, but why should an accurate description of how capitalism works, in this case in relation to banks, be regarded as somehow anti-

socialist? In fact, by showing how monetary reforms, whether based on accurate or inaccurate theory, cannot solve the problems facing wage and salary workers under capitalism, this confirms that the only way out is to establish the common ownership and democratic control of the means of life, with production to satisfy people's needs and not for profit, and distribution in accordance with the



principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs". As such, socialism will be a society without money and its problems. Banks will become redundant and the buildings and computer equipment they currently take up will be freed for other purposes.

A 'Socialist' Leader



What's going on these days in the Dail Eireann? The place is apparently crawling with socialists and Bertie Aherne is coming on like a media-friendly Bolshevik. Is it all just spin, or has Fiann Fail really taken a turn down the revolutionary trail?

In November of the year gone by, Bertie Aherne, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of the Republic Of Ireland, celebrated his tenth anniversary as leader of Fianna Fail, the largest party in the state and the dominant partner of the current coalition government. Such occasions are meant to inspire reflective contemplation and Aherne used the event to announce publicly that he is and always had been a socialist. Indeed he further claimed that he was 'one of the last socialists left in Irish politics' and always had 'a very socialist view of life'. This point was embellished in a number of subsequent interviews where he pronounced that the current regime 'was the most left-wing government in the country's history', was 'the party of real workers' and as evidence for all this said that the government's actions 'helped spread wealth more evenly' and simultaneously 'helped the deprived'. This barrage of nonsense was crowned with

some rhetorical philosophy where Aherne gave his definition of socialism: 'What is the best form of equality? It is the fact that the richest family in the area can go on a Sunday afternoon to the [publicly owned] Botanical Gardens and the poorest can too, for free!'. Actually with this last statement, though with an entirely different intention in mind, Bertie Aherne had unwittingly stumbled towards a rudimentary but crucially correct definition of Socialism; free access to everybody of everything.

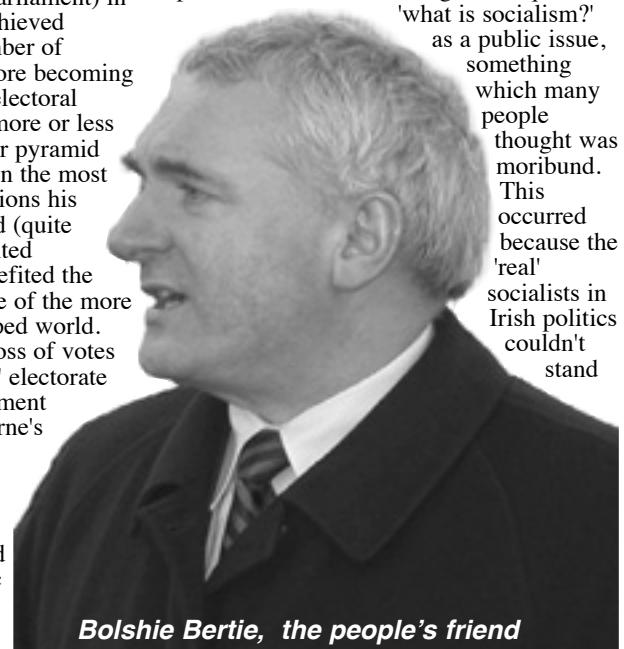
To the media commentators all of this was a welcome 'bit of sport'. The 'coming-out' of Aherne wasn't taken seriously amongst the pundits and rival politicians treated it with derision. There is a good reason for this. Aherne has built a formidable reputation for himself for his innate cunning, adroit manoeuvring and endless ability to wrong foot opponents. His sudden revelation of his socialism was seen very much in this vein. Bertie Aherne was first elected to the Dail (Irish Parliament) in 1977 and within a few years achieved ministerial rank. He held a number of important cabinet positions before becoming Taoiseach in 1997. Due to the electoral success of Fianna Fail, he has more or less been at the summit of the power pyramid for the last 20 years. However in the most recent local and European elections his party did badly, being perceived (quite justifiably) as having implemented policies that proportionally benefited the wealthy and making Ireland one of the more unequal societies in the developed world. Of particular concern was the loss of votes from their urban 'working class' electorate to the growing Sinn Fein movement with its leftist pretensions. Aherne's announcement was generally considered to be a cynical and tactical exercise to reposition Fianna Fail leftwards for the general election that is expected in 2007. Much populist rhetoric can be anticipated combined with paltry amendments to the

"What is the best form of equality? It is the fact that the richest family in the area can go on a Sunday afternoon to the Botanical Gardens and the poorest can too, for free!"

social welfare codes and other 'caring' aspects of government policy. Needless to say, the rich financial backers that Aherne has cultivated over the years won't be alarmed, knowing that these games are part of 'democratic politics' and won't seriously threaten their position.

One accidental outcome of this whole episode has been the raising of the question 'what is socialism?' as a public issue,

something which many people thought was moribund. This occurred because the 'real' socialists in Irish politics couldn't stand



Bolshie Bertie, the people's friend



Rabbitte - sarcastic

by while Aherne shamelessly grabbed the proletarian spotlight. First up was Pat Rabbitte, leader of the Irish Labour Party. Pat's freedom of manoeuvre was limited because he is currently engaged in building a potential

rival government alliance with a variety of decidedly pro-business parties. So rather than engaging in any serious policy or ideological debate with Aherne, which could in future times embarrass him more than the Taoiseach, he restricted himself to a few sarcastic cracks at Aherne. The next challenge came from Joe Higgins, sole member in the Dail for the so-called Socialist Party (formerly Militant). Joe set a test for Bertie asking for his views on public ownership, imperialist invasions and social equality. While the nature of these questions betray the Trotskyite nature of the 'Socialist

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"For Aherne 'socialism' is just a phrase to be aired when convenient."

Party', at least they were an attempt to tie down in some definite form what socialism could mean. In response to these questions, Aherne waffled through a garbled analysis about 'extreme communism' confirming to any observer that for Aherne at least 'socialism' is just a convenient phrase to be aired for a while when convenient and then, having served its purpose, quickly forgotten about.

Finally, Kieran Allen, editor of the Socialist Worker was given an opinion slot in the newspaper the Irish Times to give his perspective. The article began well, pointing out that under capitalism we vote every four to five years on 'how to run the country' but that's the end of our input into the organisation of society. In continued in this sensible course by explaining that the former regimes of Eastern Europe were not socialist and also talked about the growing power of multinational firms in a globalized

world and the enormous remunerations that their CEOs receive. However, it then degenerated into proposals for nationalisation of development land, taxes on wealth to fund the health service and taking banks into public ownership.

Ironically, although Kieran Allen presumably thought that with these last three ideas, he was illustrating the gulf between his and Aherne's definition of socialism, what Allen missed is that Aherne himself with a lifetime of political expediency behind him would have no ideological problem with any of these suggestions if that's what it took to stay in power.

We in the Socialist Party were not invited to give our views on this issue. We could send Aherne a copy of our pamphlet Socialist Principles Explained, though without any great optimism that it would be read. Nonetheless the affair does indicate that after almost ten successive years of Aherne and the Celtic Tiger and the complete absence of genuine alternative political analysis by the mainstream media, the issues thrown up by society continue to perplex our leaders, forcing them into opportunistic radical poses. ■

Kevin Cronin

Torturers 'R' US

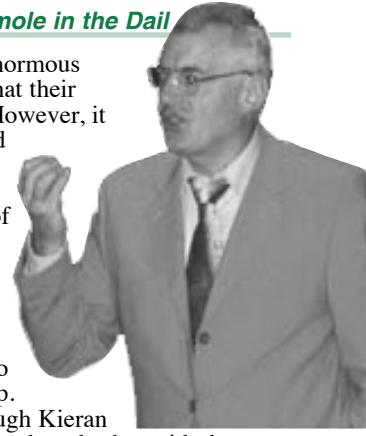
Can belief in God help to nullify the effects of pain? This is the objective of an experiment to be carried out at Oxford University and funded by the US (where else?) John Templeton Foundation, which will subject volunteers/victims to painful experiments in an effort to determine whether faith in a deity will make pain more bearable.

The report (*Times* 12 January) goes on to say how the two-year study, headed by neurologist Susan Greenfield, will be undertaken at the Oxford Centre for Science of the Mind (well, they could hardly call it "Torturers 'R' US"). It will measure people's neurological responses as they are exposed to religious symbols while being tortured in order to "determine the efficacy of their faith in helping them to cope". The aim of this is apparently to develop new approaches "for promoting wellbeing and ultimately maximising individual human potential", although how this can be achieved by torture is (pun intended) mind-blowing.

Now far be it for socialists to advocate torture in any form; however, purely in the interest of science and more importantly, since these people are actually volunteering for this experiment, may we suggest that these sanctimonious bible-bashing nutters be strapped down and subjected to a continuous playing of Cliff Richard's abominable "Millenium Prayer."

Should these volunteers be heard screaming "Jesus Christ" at the top of their voices, this should not necessarily be interpreted as an exaltation of their faith in some alleged god. ■

Tone



Book Reviews

Bolsheviks as history

The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution in Petrograd. By Alexander Rabinowitch. Pluto Press. £12.99

When this book was first published in 1976 it had some contemporary significance. The regime established by the Bolsheviks in November 1917 was still extant and many young people, dissatisfied with capitalism, were discussing Bolshevik tactics and forms of organisation as a serious way to overthrow it. Today, republished nearly thirty years later, it is a work of history much as would be a study of Robespierre and the Jacobins in 1793.

Studying history is not a waste of time of course and Rabinowitch's research does bring out some interesting points, in particular that the Bolshevik Party in 1917 was not a monolithic bloc under Lenin's thumb. He shows how in fact Lenin's views were often ignored by other Bolshevik leaders in closer touch with the feelings of soldiers and factory workers in Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was then called). It also emerges that Stalin played a rather more significant role than Trotskyists attribute him in their polemics.

Lenin (left) favoured a naked seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party; most of the other Bolshevik leaders were more circumspect; they realised, as Rabinowitch documents, that while most of the workers and soldiers wanted "peace, land and bread" and, by November 1917, were in favour of the overthrow of the Provisional Government under Kerensky because it sought to continue the war, they wanted to see it replaced by a government made up of all the "socialist" parties of Russia, i.e. of the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries as well as the Bolsheviks, that would emanate from the Congress of Soviets and which would take Russia out of the war. The Bolsheviks, therefore, followed the more subtle approach of disguising the seizure of power advocated (sometimes hysterically) by Lenin as an assumption of power by the Congress of Soviets.

Thus the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917 looked to be a "Soviet" revolution, with power appearing to pass into the hands of these makeshift representative institutions (the Russian word "soviet" means simply "council") that soldiers and workers had formed to give expression to their political views. In fact, power had passed into the hands of the minority Bolshevik Party which was determined to hold on to it, alone, come what may. But that's another (hi)story.

ALB

Ups and Downs

Capital Resurgent. Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution. By Gérard Dumenil and Dominique Lévy. Harvard University Press. £35.95.

The first parts of this book are filled with graphs and tables which deal with categories Marxists can recognise, such as the rate of profit, the rate of capital accumulation, and the share of wages and of

profits in value added. Dumenil and Lévy argue that what drives the capitalist



economy is the rate of profit and that this had begun to fall even in the 1960s. They explain this by the slow-down in the technological progress of the previous two decades which had provided an expanding market for producer goods and so had driven

the whole economy forward; this resulted in a fall in the rate of capital accumulation and consequently in the high level of unemployment that was a feature of the 1970s and 1980s. This is one possible Marxian explanation.

But then the approach changes. In the 1970s double-digit inflation benefited industrial capital at the expense of finance capital as loans could be repaid in depreciated money. According to Dumenil and Lévy, finance capital fought back by staging what they call a "coup" on 1979 - a sudden rise in interest rates as a way of trying to stop inflation. This put the boot on the other foot with, again according to the authors, firms having to use their profits to repay loans rather than re-investing them, so penalising growth and sustaining unemployment. This marked the beginning, they say, of the current period of "neoliberalism", of deregulation and return to "free market" economics, as practised by Reagan in America and Thatcher in Britain.

Dumenil and Lévy see this as a deliberate policy choice, imposed by finance capital and its representatives in government rather than any government's reaction to a particular set of capitalist conditions. Their position can be summed up as "another policy is possible" (rather less ambitious than "another world is possible"), but a more accurate reflection of what the movement whose slogan this is actually stands for. This other policy turns out to be the sort of monetary, financial and tax measures favoured, and applied in the 1950s and 60s, by the Keynesians which, according to the authors, worked acceptably enough, as far as this sort of thing is possible under capitalism, until the rate of profit dropped for other reasons and finance capital staged its coup.

A rather odd conclusion for writers claiming to be in the Marxist tradition, but even odder is their analysis of the 1929 crash and 1930s slump in purely monetary and financial terms, even suggesting that these could have been avoided if the right policies had been pursued.

ALB

Settling for what you don't want

Dennis Altman: Rehearsals for Change: Politics and Culture in Australia. Perth, Australian Public Intellectual Network, 2004

It looks encouraging that the index to this book has about 20 references both to socialism and Marxism. Unfortunately from a socialist point of view, this is deceptive.

The author sees himself as an actor in

rehearsals for change, but when it comes to the performance itself he proves to be no revolutionary. His subject is politics and culture in contemporary Australia. Like the "vote Labour with no illusions" brigade in Britain, he believes that "a Labor government will probably disappoint those of us who want radical change, but it will be more susceptible to pressures from the left than is a conservative government." So for the author it's the old choice between the lesser of two evils. Don't go for what you really want - settle for the least unpalatable version of what you don't want.

Altman knows "There are strong pressures on the ALP (Australian Labor Party) to accept the need to cut back on its aspirations and become an alternative manager of recession." Actually Australian capitalism is doing rather well in its own terms - the conservatives (Liberal Party) recently won their fourth election in a row. Maybe the ALP has something to learn from Blair about how to appeal to the electorate as the best alternative to run capitalism.

Altman believes "there is a real need for a full re-evaluation of what we mean by socialism", but his own contribution to that end is, to say the least, not very helpful. He writes of "two conflicting tendencies, centralized control, planning and governmental direction, [and] the maximum freedom consistent with social goals." He correctly sees that the first tendency results in highly authoritarian state capitalism. However, because it is sometimes described

as socialism he appears willing to accept that aim without question.

The best thing about this book is not its view of the future - which lacks inspiration and imagination - but its analysis of the present.

STAN PARKER

Altman quotes R W Connell: "Class society exploits most of the people within it, is profoundly irrational in its use of resources, and violent in its response to threats." He adds that whereas capitalism's major need was once for a disciplined workforce, the average person now needs to serve the system as both worker and consumer.

Jerry Springer - The Opera Live at Cambridge Theatre Jan 8, 10.00pm, BBC2

TV Review

Opera Winning Free?

Jerry Springer - The Opera Live at Cambridge Theatre Jan 8, 10.00pm, BBC2

Nothing is more likely to revive a flagging and esoteric artform than notoriety, and with a record 47,000 complaints to the BBC before it was even screened, *Jerry Springer - the Opera* has probably done more for opera in modern times than any number of *Magic Flutes* and *Traviatas*, even if the music wasn't quite that good. From the moment the curtain went up and the choir opened with 'She gave good head, slurp slurp, that chick with a dick' you just knew this wasn't art wearing a black tie, more a

leather gimp outfit.

Who would have thought of doing a musical send-up of confessional TV? In retrospect, it was begging to be done, for this was a sassy, strutting, lewd and outrageous work of genius. Amidst the riotous satire of Act 1 was a man wearing a nappy proclaiming to his wife 'I want to be your ba-by!', a song and dance act from the Ku Klux Klan that was a nod to 'Springtime for Hitler' in Mel Brooks' *The Producers*,



Springer: "A person with less broadcasting experience might feel responsible."

and a serial polygamist wife-beating trailer-trash whom the singing 'audience' lovingly taunt as an 'inbred three-nippled cousin-fucker'. Even commercial breaks are included on high floating screens, with the choir snapping off superb one-liners for liposuction, fast food and Prozac. Buried in the farce there are poignant hints of the real tragedy behind the lives of people who go on these shows, as a woman snarls to her psychotically religious mother 'You are just a sack of misery / Everything you touch turns to cancer', and vicious, stabbing sarcasm against the couch potato culture that has supplanted vitality with vicariousness: 'We eat, excrete and watch TV / And you are there for us, Jerry'. At times the show achieves genuine, almost Ole Man River pathos, as for instance when overweight trailer-trash wife who wants to be a pole-dancer sings a beautiful aria in these words:

'I don't give a fuck no more / if people think I'm just a whore. / I wanna do some living / Cos I'm so tired of dying / I just wanna dance.'

Most of the complaints, by people who hadn't seen the show (of course), were about swear words (naturally), amplified by the Daily Mail (who else?) using the ingenious device of multiplying each word by every member of the 27 strong choir who sing it, thus achieving a total of 8,000. The rest of the fuss was over Act 2, a somewhat superfluous attempt to string out an already worked idea, which featured a dying Jerry Springer being forced by the Devil to conduct a show in Hell in an attempt to reconcile Satan with Jesus. Jerry, alarmed, turns briefly into WC Fields: 'I don't want to serve in Hell. At this stage in my career that would be a sideways move.' The reconciliation doesn't work, of course, as Springer had warned: 'I don't solve problems, I just televise them' and in classic

confessional tradition degenerates into a multiway row between Jesus, Satan, God, the Virgin Mary and the audience. All very amusing, but the Christian objectors were too egocentric to see that this wasn't really the point of the opera at all, even if the religious hysteria that resulted certainly did wonders for publicity. The point was to confront Springer, Scrooge-like, with the consequences of his show, the real broken lives out of which he profits. How does he sleep at night, we are invited to ask? Only mildly chastened by an harangue from a dead woman with a monkey-wrench in her skull, he muses: 'A person with less broadcasting experience might feel responsible', but his real philosophy is summed up by his warm-up man (aka the Devil): 'You and I both know they're scum' and in the event he is exonerated even by the scum themselves: 'Jerry is not to blame / With or without Jerry's show / We'd all end up the same'.

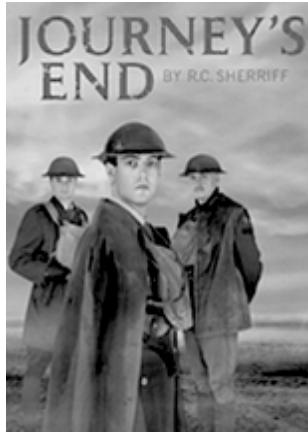
The BBC deserves particular credit for not quailing under the religious onslaught, including direct action threats and a private prosecution for blasphemy, especially given the recent decision to pull another play about an abusive Imam after complaints from Moslems. London readers can see this sell-out show live, if they can get a ticket, while the rest of us have to hope the BBC has got the cojones to screen it again. It may not analyse class, it may not offer hope for the future, it may be just a tad elitist in its targets, but this is blistering stuff all the same, and satire doesn't get better. It's also the best performance David Soul's ever given.

PJS

Theatre Review

World War, Not Class War

'Journey's End' by R.C. Sherriff. The Duke of York's Theatre, London.



Once there was a war in which men walked into battle kicking footballs, with rum on their last dying breaths, lead by officers in riding breeches carrying silver-topped canes.

Whilst equal through the sights of a Maxim gun, in the last analysis class separated them as effectively as no-man's-land kept them apart from the enemy. Although the ordinary Tommy or Hun possessed some degree of loyalty to their officers, class underpinned all social relationships to the extent that the average soldier often felt more in common with his enemy counterpart than with his own superiors.

This, of course, was the First World War, in which R. C. Sherriff's play *Journey's End* is set. As a teenaged officer, Sherriff saw action at the Somme and later at

Passchendaele where he received a 'Blighty' (was wounded badly enough to be sent back to Britain). Thus his play has what Remarque's contemporaneous *All Quiet on the Western Front* also has: the authority of first-hand experience. Indeed, the believability of the play is one of its strengths. Set solely in a front-line dug out, the story concerns the relations between a group of officers as they await the start of Germany's 1918 Spring offensive. Raleigh, a rosy-cheeked 18-year-old fresh from the playing fields of Eton or Harrow, meets Stanhope, his childhood hero from school and now a hard-bitten whiskey-driven veteran of 21, who immediately resents the return of the fawning teenager into his life. The laid-back leadership style of 40-year-old Osborne, 'Uncle' to the youngsters, affects a calming influence as he comes between the petulant youngsters like a relentlessly understanding class tutor. 'Dear old Uncle, tuck me up', says an exhausted Stanhope from his bunk and in a moment of tenderness it's as if a patient father is putting to bed his straying but essentially decent son. The play concludes with a touching reconciliation between Stanhope and Raleigh before the naïve youngster's inevitable death.

But a play about the officer class would not be complete without its representatives of the common soldiery. After all, the officers need their servants and clowns as much as Shakespeare's aristocrats needed their Bottoms, Pistols and Porters. Sherriff gives us Trotter and Mason, the former a mercilessly chirpy Cockney promoted from the ranks to officer status who walks eye-deep in hell with a song and a smile; the latter the dug-out dogsbody treated like a servant even in these conditions and whose lines mainly concern the dietary requirements of the officers. There is something comical about these two characters, something of the Sam Weller 'wery pleased to make your haquaintance, sah', something you are meant to laugh at. This only may be to provide some light relief for the fraught situation, but you are not meant to laugh at the other characters - you are meant to understand and empathise with them. Being working class, at best they are shrewd but, lacking the formal education of the others, contribute little to the gravitas of the play other than to make remarks such as 'these hapricots is gorn orf, sah'. One would not want an Owen to walk into the trenches to teach Tommies socialism, however, for it would not work in the context of the play. *Journey's End* after all is concerned solely with the officer class and so there is not the space for serious and intelligent working class characters (whereas there is in Miles Malleson's *D Company* and *Black Ell*). Unfortunately, 75 years after the play opened, there still seems little room for serious and intelligent working class characters in theatre, film and TV. But that's another story.

Despite this, Sherriff's play is a powerful and memorable piece of theatre which succeeded to entertain and move its audience. Whilst relegating the noticeably working class characters to minor or frivolous roles, it does offer what is probably a faithful account of upper-class men at war.

NW

Fifty Years Ago

Looking at Football

Sport for Profit

Once competition was on its feet, professionalism was the inevitable outcome. Watching competitive games became a popular recreation in the northern industrial towns, and success-hungry teams used the obvious means to get good players to join them. In 1885 professionalism was recognized; in a few years football meant Preston, Blackburn and Sheffield instead of the Wanderers, Royal Engineers and Carthusians (. . .).

The biggest changes were still to come. However skilful its play, a losing team has few followers—that is, its income falls. The huge partisan crowds at football matches in the 'twenties were prepared to see only their own sides win, and applaud any sort of play to that end. The Arsenal introduced the "stopper" centre-half, a player whose business was to obstruct the opponents and nothing else. The method caught on because it was successful; it still dominates football. The units in the pattern of today's teams are the rough, destructive centre-half, the fast-chasing wingers and

the hard-kicking, opportunistic centre-forward (. . .).

A footballer's maximum wage is fifteen pounds a week in the playing season (many clubs pay nothing like the maximum). Players receive bonuses of two pounds for a win and one pound for a draw, and a few of them are famous enough to make a little more by writing newspaper columns or advertizing. Thus, a first-class player is lucky if he take £700 in a year. Certainly his earnings are not to be compared with a jockey's, and his playing career usually ends before he is thirty-five (though every footballer understates his age). A small number become managers, coaches and so on, but obviously there is not room for more than a few to do so.

Football combines some of the best things games can offer—physical exercise, skill, co-operation with others. Commercialism has shaped it along certain lines, making success more important than enjoyment. Watching it played well can give us much pleasure as a ballet or a



symphony. More often, however, it is a weekly relief from tedium or a source of vicarious satisfactions ranging from dreams of fame to revenge fantasies. Nor can too much be said for commercial football from the players' point of view. It would be wrong to suppose they do not enjoy it (even the ones who say they play just for money). All the same, it is their bread and butter, and only the exceptionally skilful plays can afford not to help the fair means with some of the other sort (so you can see the same nasty little tricks aped in schoolboy games, too). A professional footballer has several years with play instead of work and a great deal of adulation, and afterwards he is turned into a workaday world almost completely unprepared for it.

It seems a pity that a good sport should be tarnished by the profit system. But then, what isn't?

(From an article by R. Coster, Socialist Standard, February 1955)



Meetings

VAUXHALL

Monday 21 February, 8pm

GLOBALIZATION WHICH WAY FORWARD: WORLD SOCIALISM OR TAX REFORM?

Debate between Tax Justice Network (John Christensen) and the Socialist Party (Adam Buick). Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 (nearest tube: Clapham North).

WEST LONDON

Tuesday 15 February, 8pm

SOCIALIST ACTIVITY IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Speaker: Adam Buick
Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W.4
(nearest tube: Chiswick Park)

GLASGOW.

Discussion class, Central Community Halls, 304, Maryhill Road. February 16 at 8.00pm

"THE SOCIALIST FUTURE"

Dick Donnelly explores some aspects of a socialist society and how it would affect our normal everyday life. Would we live in cities? Would we be able to reverse the present global warming? Would we spend more time travelling? Would there be a division of labour? Let's hope we can come up with some answers.

Manchester

Monday 28 February, 8 pm

Hare and Hounds Shudehill, City centre

'How Would Socialism Handle a Natural Disaster?'

Speaker: Paddy Shannon

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles
The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds:

- That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

- That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

- That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

- That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

- That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

- That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

- That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

- The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Toadies and Rebels

Naughtier readers of the *Guardian* enjoy a weekly item which delights in exposing the sickening antics of the Top

Toadies - New Labour MPs who unfailingly toe the Blairite line in the hopes of ensuring the continuity of their ambitions. To justify this behaviour, appalling as it is to anyone concerned to debate political solutions to society's problems, grovelling Labour Members may refer to the experiences of two ex-MPs, both Tory, who died recently.

Anthony Meyer was known as a "natural" MP in the sense that he did not foresee, nor perhaps want, promotion - which made it easier to be a rebel. Of course it always helps in this to have a secure background. Meyer's grandfather was a wealthy banker and his father vice-chairman of the De Beers diamond cartel. Meyer went to Eton and Oxford and after the war he joined the Foreign Office, posted to embassies in Paris and Moscow. In 1962 his career plans were changed when on the death of his mother he inherited the family wealth. His background made him an ideal Tory candidate and he was nominated to contest Eton and Slough in 1964 against Fenner Brockway, whose role in the Labour Party was to re-assure doubters that, in spite of everything their party did, it still had principles and a conscience which somehow, sometime, could be nurtured into flower.

Rebellion

A local Tory advised Meyer to flavour his election campaign with some discreet but

unmistakable racism; he rejected this idea and went on to scrape home by a majority of eleven. He had had hardly any time to savour his victory when Harold

Wilson cashed in on Labour's popularity to call another election in 1966, where Meyer lost to Joan Lestor, who should have known better than to embark on a wretched career as a Labour politician. Adrift without a constituency, Meyer was not above using the Etonian connection to get himself selected for another, his old friend Nigel Birch's seat at West Flintshire. Finally, he represented Clywd North West.

Soon after he arrived at Westminster Meyer clearly asserted that he did not regard toeing any party line as being

essential to an MP. Aside from upsetting a lot of his fellow party members with his ardent support for British capitalism joining the European super market, he opposed the Conservative government over the Westland affair, the Poll Tax and Reagan's bombing of Libya. In amongst a storm of jingoist hysteria, he stood out against the Falklands War, putting to shame Labour MPs, including their leader Michael Foot, who supported the war. This is not to say that Meyer was what is called a left-wing Tory: he opposed sanctions against the Smith regime in Rhodesia and after losing at Eton and Slough he subsidised and published Solon, a magazine for "intellectuals" on the Right.

Thatcher

But a consistent pre-occupation for him was his opposition to Thatcher. He found her performance at Prime Minister's Questions, which so delighted the more slavish Tories in the Commons, "an increasingly sickening spectacle". As the pressure on Thatcher built up Meyer was involved in the movement to challenge her leadership in an election. Thatcher described this group as "a range of back benchers who for various idiosyncratic reasons, or because they had been denied or removed from office, would be happy to line up against me". In 1989 there were more likely candidates than Meyer but they would not stick their neck out at that stage so he got himself nominated. Predictably, he lost with only 33 votes but an ominous total of 60 Tory MPs did not vote for Thatcher and a year later she was persuaded to go after another election "victory" had left her mortally damaged. For his part in denting the apparent invincibility of the Iron Lady Meyer was pronounced second only to Mikhail Gorbachev in a Man of the Year contest - which did not persuade the Tory party in Clywd to keep him as their candidate.

Meyer's privileged upbringing was not available to Nicholas Scott who, without being one of the more obnoxious toadies, did show a certain readiness to adjust what he called his principles as the price of a place on the Tory Front Bench. He probably thought he was projecting the humane face of Conservative government - which in July 1974 ensured that Time magazine unwisely named him as a future world leader. He did not go to public school or university and his early career was in marketing and advertising. However when he was told that "all the prettiest girls are in the Young Conservatives" he felt an exciting new career beckoning. He rose through the ranks of the Young Tories and his local council to get into the Commons in 1966 for Paddington West. An early marker for him was his opposition to the Callaghan government restrictions on Asian immigrants from East Africa, which was a shamefully cynical reversal of Labour's opposition to similar measures by the Tory government in 1962. (Scott himself also backtracked on this issue in 1972 when, as a Home Office Minister, he had to promote such limits.)

Chelsea

As a close supporter of Ted Heath, Scott held a variety of ministerial jobs until in February 1974 he lost his Paddington seat. In the general election of October that year Scott won easily in unwaveringly Tory Chelsea, although his reputation for extra-marital affairs did not go down well with all sections of the local party. "Can a man who breaks his marriage vow be trusted as a politician?" snarled one of them, displaying the customary delusions about the nature of both marriage and political parties. Now restored to the Commons, Scott held a succession of lower-rung posts, in some of which he both caused and endured a measure of embarrassment. During his time at the Northern Ireland Office, responsible for the prisons there, he had to answer for a mass IRA break-out from the Maze. Later, as a minister for the disabled, he chose to

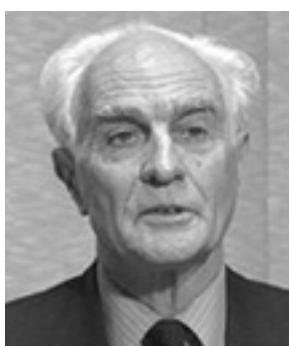
deceive the Commons about the government's part in wrecking a private member's Bill of Rights for the disabled. His discomfort was heightened when his daughter, who was a lobbyist for the disabled, denounced his trickery: "Professionally" she stormed "I think (for him to resign) would be

the honourable thing to do. Professionally I am very angry. Personally I feel rather let down". Caught bang to rights, Scott did as his daughter suggested.

As the storm clouds gathered over him, Scott began to look increasingly vulnerable. He did not help himself when he walked away from a road accident in which he shunted his car into another, trapping a pram holding a three-year-old child. Scott had to face three charges of drink driving. If he had been what is known as an ordinary member of the public he might have found himself in gaol; but as an extraordinary Member of Parliament he was merely fined and banned from driving. As if that was not enough, a short time later at the Tory conference in Bournemouth the police found him face down in the gutter and were not impressed by his excuse that two glasses of wine had not mixed happily with the pain killers he was taking for a bad back. The constituency activists in Chelsea decided they had had enough and he was deselected. That was the end of the prospective world leader's political career. "Well," he said, "If you can't take a joke you should not be in politics".

While all this goes on capitalism, which is not a joke, continues to exert its misery and distress on its people. In this country the deputy prime minister's office recently reported a seven per cent rise in homelessness last year. The charity Shelter said this represented 230,000 people without a proper home; the charity Crisis put this as high as 500,000. Abroad, as a normal event without the intervention of some great natural disaster, 30,000 people die every day of preventable causes; the effects of poverty kill a child every three seconds. In that perspective, what does it matter if capitalism's leaders are toadies or rebels? Meyer and Scott were once hailed as future leaders of capitalism. Now they are properly footnotes in the system's grisly history. ■ Ivan

Meyer: Toady or Rebel?



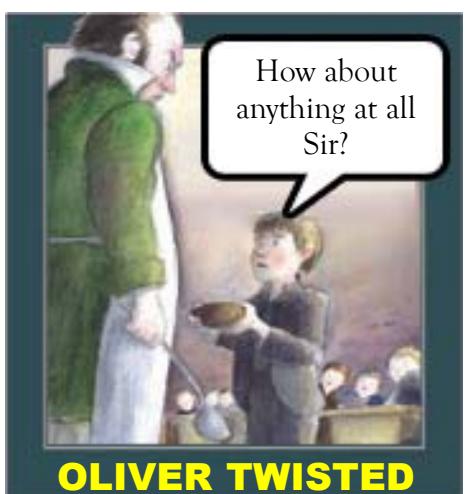
Socialist Standard February 2005

Voice from the Back



Leave the kids alone

This should be taught in every schoolroom on earth, instead of the chloroform that is, at present, fed to our kids: "640 million children do not have adequate shelter. 500 million children have no access to sanitation. 400 million children do not have access to safe water. 300 million children lack access to information (TV, radio or newspapers). 270 million have no access to health care services. 140 million children, the majority of them girls, have never been to school. 90 million children are severely food deprived." (UNICEF press release, 9 December) "Please, Sir, shouldn't we try to change things?" asks the class rebel. "Be quiet and do as you are told", is always the reply.



OLIVER TWISTED

A black christmas

Last year was a dreadful year for the working class. It was not a particularly good year for socialists either, so excuse us if we have at least one good laugh about 2004. "Members of the far right

British National party walked out of their own Christmas party after organisers accidentally hired a black DJ. 'We had to be careful what we said when we did the



raffle so we didn't offend the guy,' said BNP official Bob Garner. The party, at a London hotel was organised by the party's central London branch. 'He sounded white on the phone,' said Garner." (Sunday Times, 12 December) You couldn't make it up, could you?

No housing problem here

"Rupert Murdoch is set to pay a record \$44 million for a New York home when he snaps up the Fifth Avenue penthouse of the late Laurence Rockefeller. ... However, even at \$44 million, the price Mr Murdoch is paying is dwarfed by the \$70 million that the Wall Street financier Martin Zweig wants for his nearby triplex atop the Pierre Hotel on Fifth Avenue." (Times, 18 December) Any offers,

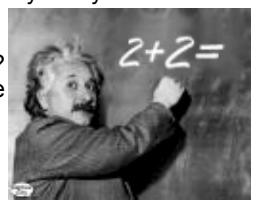


Nice gaff - The Pierre Hotel caff.

fellow workers? Before you cash in your giros and make a bid it is as well to remember that Mr Murdoch's inferior flat costs \$21,500 per month in maintenance. You may well be a little more out of pocket each month with Mr Zweig's pad.

Surprise, surprise

A study by academics at London University's Institute of Education into the teaching of 8 to 11 year-olds, 88,700 of them, from 2000 to '03, has come up with an astounding discovery. "The children from the poorest backgrounds made the least progress throughout - starting behind other children aged seven and falling further behind by the age of 11." (Independent, 6 January) So a kid that is badly fed, badly clothed, badly housed and most likely badly treated is less likely to bloom academically. Astonishing, isn't it? Where would we be without these academic wizards?



Oops, no one is perfect

"Fourteen Iraqis were reported killed and five injured early yesterday morning after an American war plane obliterated a family house in the north of the country. The military said it was a mistake." (Independent, 9 January) The authorities have promised a full inquiry. It must be reassuring to know that when a 500lb bomb annihilates your family there will be a full enquiry. These things happen in the struggle for oil, but it must be marvellous to think of your mother, father and all of your children described as collateral damage. Mustn't it?

Meetings All our meetings are free and open to the public. See page 18

Free lunch

by Rigg



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